

# Journalists in Turkey convicted of terrorism

Author:

Mon, 2019-12-30 00:22

JEDDAH: Seven people from a Turkish newspaper including six journalists have been convicted of terror-related charges. An Istanbul court convicted the group from Sözcü newspaper on Friday, handing down prison terms of two years or more.

The charges relate to a failed coup attempt in 2016 to oust the Turkish government and remove President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Ankara blamed the coup attempt on Fethullah Gülen, a Turkish preacher who has lived in self-imposed exile in the US since 1999.

The seven individuals were convicted of helping the coup perpetrators through their reporting.

Columnists Emin Colasan and Necati Dogru were handed down sentences of three years and six months. The paper's chief editor Metin Yilmaz and its online edition's managing editor, Mustafa Cetin, were given three years. Online news editor Yucel Ari, financial manager Yonca Yucelan and journalist Gokmen Ulu were sentenced to two years each.

They will appeal the verdict and have denied the charges against them. Sözcü denounced the verdict as a "black stain."

Turkey is ranked the second highest jailer of journalists in the world according to data from the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ).

Currently 108 journalists are incarcerated in Turkey, where the media industry is either controlled directly by the government or by conglomerates which are dependent on government contracts and therefore back the state's position.

"Turkey's daily Sözcü is and always has been openly critical of the group which the journalists were found guilty of helping," Ozgur Ogret, the CPJ's Turkey representative, told Arab News. "This trial has always been an absurd one from the very beginning by that fact alone."

## **HIGHLIGHT**

The seven individuals were convicted of helping the coup perpetrators through their reporting.

Dozens of media outlets were shut down following the coup attempt and, as many newspapers depend on advertising revenue that the Press Advertising Agency allocates from state resources, there emerged another trigger for self-censorship and restrictions on the space for independent journalism. Sözcü is a staunch opposition of the domestic and foreign policies of Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party's (AKP), enraging pro-government circles through critical headlines especially those regarding the president.

Colasan recently criticized Erdogan over his decision to send troops to Libya's Government of National Accord, asking how could the president speak so irresponsibly, while Dogru has written about government corruption. The newspaper also disclosed where Erdogan was on the day of the coup attempt, infuriating pro-Ankara figures who said the president had been made into a target.

"Turkish authorities have tried and imprisoned many journalists since the failed coup attempt of 2016 with highly questionable evidence of links to Gülen and his network, like in the Cumhuriyet trial," said Ogret. "The guilty verdict of the Sözcü trial is the latest example of this misguided approach." Kemal Kilicdaroglu, who leads the main opposition CHP, also condemned the verdict. "It is a decision made upon the instruction of the political authority," he told Arab News. "They cannot tolerate that Sözcü enlightens Turkey and says the truth."



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# Anxious Gazans fear for the future as daily life in Palestine worsens

Author:

Mon, 2019-12-30 00:15

Mother-of-six Suad Sultan, 54, cannot hide her fear that the coming year will be all but impossible for her family along with other residents of the Gaza Strip.

After years of conflict, and with no political or economic solutions on the horizon, living conditions in the Palestinian enclave are steadily worsening. Two of Sultan's children are university graduates, but are unable to find work and build their own families, just as her husband cannot find a job with a steady income.

"We are on the threshold of a new year, but I can see no difference between last year and the coming year. All I see is another year of suffering," Sultan said.

In 2012, the UN Conference on Trade and Development predicted that the Gaza Strip could become "uninhabitable by 2020."

"The social, health and security implications of high demographic growth and overpopulation are among the factors that may make Gaza uninhabitable by 2020," the report said. The Gaza Strip suffers from a scarcity of water sources. Up to 97 percent of the groundwater is unsuitable for drinking, forcing the local population to buy supplies from itinerant vendors.

## **SPEEDREAD**

In 2012, the UN Conference on Trade and Development predicted that the Gaza Strip could become 'uninhabitable by 2020.'

A shortage of medical services is another pressing problem. Sultan said: "I don't care about official reports, positive or negative. The circumstances on the ground show that we are in a very bad situation."

High unemployment adds to the enclave's woes, with up to 60 percent of young people unable to find work. "We have been living in an uninhabitable place for many years," Ali Salman, 31, a freelance nurse told Arab News.

"Things have been getting complicated since the war in 2014, and if you look at our situation you will find that the elements of life are absent here. The electricity is cut off, infrastructure is destroyed, water is not safe to drink, transportation is difficult and agriculture continues to deteriorate.





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Organizers say Gaza protests to be scaled back in March

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## [Israel to withhold \\$43 million of Palestinian tax funds](#)

Author:

Mon, 2019-12-30 00:03

JERUSALEM: The Israeli Security Cabinet on Sunday voted to withhold \$43 million of tax funds from the Palestinians, saying the money has been used to promote violence, Israeli media reported.

The sum represents funds that Israel says the Palestinians have used to pay the families of Palestinians who have been jailed or killed as a result of attacking Israel, according to various reports.

Israel says the so-called Martyrs' Fund rewards violence. The Palestinians say the payments are needed to help vulnerable families who have been affected by violence and Israeli occupation.

Under past agreements, Israel collects customs and other taxes on behalf of

the Palestinians and transfers the money to the Palestinian Authority. These monthly transfers, about \$170 million, are a key source of funding for the budget of the authority, which administers parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

Israel last year passed a law deducting parts of these transfers and Sunday's decision was a continuation of that policy.

In February, after Israel withheld \$140 million, the Palestinians said they would reject all transfers to protest the Israeli policy. But six months later, with the Palestinian Authority in a deep financial crisis, the sides worked out a deal to resume most of the transfers.

Palestinian official Hanan Ashrawi denounced the latest Israeli move, calling it a "blatant act of theft and political extortion."

"This is a clear violation of Palestinian rights and signed agreements as well as a criminal act of collective punishment exacted for cynical domestic Israeli political reasons," she said.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office declined comment.



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# Iraq protesters lock down oil field

Author:

Mon, 2019-12-30 00:05

NASIRIYAH: Iraqi anti-government protesters blockaded an oil field and rallied in southern cities on Sunday while political factions remained paralyzed in their attempts to form a new government. Several hundred people demanding jobs shut off access to the Nassiriya field, 300 km south of Baghdad, which produces 82,000 barrels of oil per day, executives said. The two-day-old blockade is the first to disrupt operations in OPEC's second largest producer since the start of the popular revolt set to enter its fourth month in early January.

The youth-led protests demand the ouster of the entire political class that has run the country in the aftermath of the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled dictator Saddam Hussein.

Demonstrators have vented their fury at what they consider inept politicians who have mismanaged the economy, enriched themselves and are beholden to powerful neighbor Iran.

Sit-in protests have shut down state offices and schools across the Shiite-majority south for weeks, and demonstrators again declared a "general strike" in Diwaniya on Sunday, the first day of the working week.

Mass rallies and picket lines also paralyzed Kout, Al-Hilla, Amara and the city of Najaf, AFP correspondents said.

The protests have continued despite being met with batons, tear gas and, at times, live rounds in violence that has claimed nearly 460 lives and left some 25,000 people wounded.

The activists scored a partial success in November with the resignation of prime minister Adel Abdul Mahdi, who however remains in charge in a caretaker role.

Pro-Iranian and other political factions have since wrangled over finding a successor – so far without success.

And although Parliament has just voted for an electoral reform package, there has been no indication that the early polls many citizens are calling for will be held anytime soon.

Heightening the turmoil, President Barham Saleh last week threatened to resign rather than put forward the name of a pro-Iran candidate to form the next government.

## **HIGHLIGHT**

Several hundred people demanding jobs shut off access to the Nassiriya field, 300 km south of Baghdad, which produces 82,000 barrels of oil per day.

Nassiriya student demonstrator Osama Ali praised the head of state, saying he had "foiled the attempts by parties and militiamen to kill off the revolution



to protect their own interests.”

“This gives us hope to continue our peaceful movement until we obtain all our demands,” he told AFP.

Those demands include an end to a system that doles out state jobs according to ethnicity and religion, and a stop to the endemic corruption estimated to have swallowed up twice Iraq’s GDP in 16 years.

The protesters also want justice for those activists who have been murdered, many shot dead in the streets or outside their homes.

Dozens have also reported being abducted to rural areas near Baghdad for several hours or days before being abandoned by the roadside.

The UN has accused “militias” of waging a sweeping campaign of threats, kidnappings and murders of demonstrators. The state-run Human Rights Commission says it has still not heard from 56 missing activists.



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[Iraqi artists pay tribute to dead](#)

# protesters with sculptures

Sun, 2019-12-29 23:57

BAGHDAD: The sculptures carved by seven art trainees were lined up outside a makeshift workshop in Baghdad's Tahrir Square. With them were posters depicting protesters who have been killed in anti-government demonstrations in the past three months.

One sculpture showed a protester with a tear gas canister in his eye. Another showed a volunteer tuk tuk driver next to his three-wheeled vehicle who was killed while evacuating wounded protesters during clashes. A third illustrated a protester's hand flashing the victory sign and colored by the Iraqi flag.

For Iraqi artist Mahdi Qarnous, 53, the exhibition that was recently inaugurated in Baghdad's central Tahrir Square – the epicenter of Iraq's anti-government protest movement – is a personal contribution to the movement. It is aimed at immortalizing fellow protesters killed and kidnapped during the demonstrations that have engulfed Iraq since Oct. 1. It is also a way, he says, to allow young, talented Iraqis to channel their talents away from violence.

Iraq has been roiled by protests that have left at least 490 people dead, the vast majority of them demonstrators killed by security forces firing tear gas and live ammunition. The mass uprisings prompted the resignation of former Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi late last month.

Qarnous said he recruited seven uneducated and unemployed young protesters from Tahrir Square, put them through an intensive six-week course that he personally funded and after three weeks they were able to start their own art projects.

We see this activity as part of the ongoing protests and a memorial monument for our martyrs and our abducted fellow protesters.

## **Mahdi Qarnous, Iraqi artist**

"We see this activity as part of the ongoing protests and a memorial monument for our martyrs and our abducted fellow protesters," he said.

Tahrir Square has emerged as a focal point of the protests, with protesters camped out in tents. Dozens of people took part in the simple opening of the sculpture exhibition on a recent day. None of the art trainees who were presenting their work attended the event, however, and their names were withheld due to security concerns.

"The current regime produced a generation that is poor in producing and cherishing arts. ... You see here in this exhibition that our people have potential but lack the path," said Qarnous.

Murtada Muthanna, 23, an artist and activist, said the exhibition is a message to the world.

"It says we are a people with inspirations for life not death. Our revolution is peaceful and we are seeking reform not destruction," he said.





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